



Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk

DEAN C. LOGAN
Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk

May 4, 2017

TO: Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, Chairman
Supervisor Hilda L. Solis
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl
Supervisor Janice Hahn
Supervisor Kathryn Barger

Sachi A. Hamai, Chief Executive Officer

FROM: Dean C. Logan,  Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk

NEW MANDATED LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS

The Department has completed a review of the federally mandated language requirements for election jurisdictions. In December 2016, the U.S. Census Bureau issued revised language requirements for state and county election jurisdictions based on provisions set forth in Sections 203 and 4(f)4 of the Voting Rights Act. The languages identified by the Bureau directs jurisdictions to provide language assistance to voters belonging to covered language groups.

The new requirements state Los Angeles County is no longer mandated to provide language assistance services to voters of "Japanese", "Asian Indian" and "Thai" groups. Although the December 2016 announcement reduced the Department's Voting Rights mandate and, as a result, could potentially net some cost savings, our recommendation is to not reduce services with respect to the three above-mentioned languages based on the following:

- (a) Consistency. Over the past five years, Los Angeles County has fostered an inclusive and transparent democratic process by providing language assistance in nine different languages, other than English. Voters with limited English proficiency may exercise their right to vote with assistance from translated election materials and bilingual poll workers in Chinese, Japanese, Hindi/Asian Indian, Khmer/Cambodian, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog/Filipino, Thai, and Vietnamese. Maintaining our current level of service will allow thousands of eligible voters to continue receiving language assistance and strengthen our democratic process.

Furthermore, there exists the likelihood that the federal government could mandate these three languages in the next reporting period. Should the Department discontinue these services, groundwork related to outreach and community partnership to promote these language services would need to be re-established.

(b) Continuity of service. Through partnerships, outreach, media events and promotion of services, the total number of voters who have requested language assistance is:

- Hindi: 336
- Japanese: 2,092
- Thai: 762

(c) Infrastructure. The Department has already invested significant resources and built a solid infrastructure for the nine previously mandated languages. Translated election materials, bilingual pollworker recruitment, multilingual voter hotline, seasonal bilingual staff, website and bilingual voter database provide full language assistance and translations. Specifically, of the three languages no longer mandated, Japanese has been part of the original (2000 Census) mandate with assistance provided for the past 15 years. Elimination of any language assistance may create confusion for bilingual voters.

(d) Community Partnership. The Department's language assistance program is a product of partnerships with community groups and has yielded positive and lasting relationships with key stakeholders. The Department regularly obtains feedback from community groups designed to improve bilingual pollworker recruitment, Election Day services and translation services. Reduction in these services, including elimination of services in favor of cost savings, will negatively impact relationships between Los Angeles County and community-based organizations.

Cultural and linguistic diversity is one of Los Angeles County's defining characteristics. In addition to being the nation's largest election jurisdiction, it is widely recognized as one of the most diverse. This diversity creates a vibrant democracy, but also challenges us to provide excellent service to voters. We look forward to continuing a high level of service for our diverse communities and our commitment to providing Los Angeles County with fair, accessible, and transparent election services.

If you have any questions or require further information, please feel free to contact me or your staff may contact Aaron Nevarez, Division Manager of Governmental & Legislative Affairs, at (562) 462-2800.